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Memorist Evocation: Painting as a Mnemonic Device

by

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Statement of Originality

This thesis contains no material, which has been accepted, for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it incorporates no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgment is made in the text.

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Abstract

By investigating the connections between the real, remembered and imagined, this research project set out as an inquiry into the capacity of painting to function as a mnemonic device. People who use such devices can be referred to as “memorists” (Reber, Allen & Reber 2009). Through process-based drawing, collage and painting, I placed objects, imbued with traumatic family histories, into compositions that were visual attempts at remembering spaces of my childhood. My intention was to test relationships that exist between drawing and collage and how each of these processes could bring to painting the experience of remembering. Painting, I concluded, was an articulate practice that benefitted from the disjointed and fragmentary nature of collage as a preparatory process.

The paintings draw on remembered events with the backdrop of the 1960s and 1970s of my childhood. Inherited objects from this time provide evidence of my ancestral trauma of penury, diaspora and war. In my hand these *vestige* objects have the literal weight of their primary function and the metaphoric weight of memories. Vestige describes a disparate group of inherited ancestral objects including a bayonet from the Great War, a family bible, and whimsies such as a ceramic figurine. The paintings are about these real objects and their histories painted on canvas from life or photographs, coalescing in contextual spaces based on uncertain childhood memories.

The project was supported by research into theories of memory, objects and landscape. Each contribution, philosophical or clinical, co-acted for strategies

and methodologies in making. Psychoanalytic theories (of van der Kolk, Laplanche and Pontalis) provided working definitions of memory-recall that aligned with painting strategies in the studio. The work of Maurice Halbwachs offered insights into existential questions relating to physical objects in daily contact and notions of permanence and stability. Ian Farr theorised on the role of landscape in the consciousness of childhood. Jill Bennett, in her work *Empathic Vision*, discusses the use of fiction and fantasy in art that endeavours to visually register experience of traumatic memory.

Artworks discussed in the Context chapter, 2 are significant because they exemplify the evocative potency of trauma, memory, banal objects and interior spaces in collage and painting. The work explores various interpretive modes of painting that challenge ways of perceiving the encounters between subjective realities and the above topics. Examination of work by Albert Tucker and Imants Tillers provided a perspective on trauma and diaspora. Paintings by Matthias Weischer and Dexter Dalwood are used to discuss the relationship between pictorial ‘interior space’ and memory. Historical perspectives on still life and collage in the work of Picasso and Braque are contrasted with a contemporary collaging of ‘tabletop’ space in the work of James Lynch.

In conclusion I found that vestige objects have the ability to draw something out of the painter, more than could have been understood at the beginning of the project. An intimate engagement was established with the objects. They were near enough to be touched and constantly scrutinised. This intimacy allowed me to reflect on their original intended functions: killing, advertising and

story-telling, all being different from their banal utilitarian, domestic functions as remembered from childhood. The paintings problematize the relationships between real objects, their remembered banality and their representation in paint.

My thesis demonstrates that, with the techniques I have employed, I can bring these things together. Paintings have considerable coherency (structurally) to offer a plausible pictorial account of how one might visualise and make sense of the snippets of childhood memory that have such a significant role to play in psychological and social formation.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction and Overview

Outline of Practical Enquiry

In this research project I have set out to make paintings that can articulate the workings of memory, specifically relating to childhood, and to show how painting can use combinatorial strategies drawn from memory, imagination and the depiction of real objects to achieve this. Its focus has been the representation of personal family history as a ‘case study’ to test how memory can be made visual.

Project Description

This research is focused on the construction of paintings that primarily describe a world of the real, remembered and imagined and which reveal a set of pictorial events set forth as a field of shifting relationships between the verifiable and the dubious. The research tests the suitability of painting for evoking the experience of remembering. I have aimed to paint and draw real objects using these depictions in concert with painted, imagined and partially remembered spaces of childhood.

In order to test this concept I have used a combination of acrylic and oil paints. The versatility of paint, its characteristics in both ‘lean’ and ‘impasto’ application, can be used to define and to represent spaces that speak of vague recollection as well as the literal representation of the ‘things’, a theme which is at the centre of my investigation. Drawing and collage have been used to support

compositional development and to inform the direction of research and the final studio outcomes. Painting is a productive medium for representing the workings of memory. The processes of painting involve applications that can be a visual parallel in the ways they reflect certain clinical descriptions of memory, for example thin washes are analogous to the ‘fog’ of memory and broken brush marks represent disrupted memory.

The Research Questions

During the course of this project I have investigated how painting might bring the workings of memory into conscious recollection through visual form and whether the depiction of real objects (extant, concrete and verifiable) might be drawn together with imagined, half-remembered spaces and contexts (past, unverifiable, ephemeral) to evoke the complexity of memory and recall. In looking for pictorial solutions I have investigated whether collage could be an appropriate medium for picture construction, especially since collage often employs the juxtaposition of real objects or their representations with other forms of mark-making. This has led to paintings that employ many of the strategies of collage whilst at the same time investigating how painting’s own techniques contribute to the successful resolution of the research aims.

The research objectives test the success or otherwise of my painterly experiments in the field of memory narrative, and focus on the tension that exists between objective and subjective observation and intention. There are

implications within the pictorial issues of my project that pose questions for the ‘making’ process of painting and the thesis of painting as a mnemonic device.

Terminology

Memory

Different clinically-identified categories of memory derived from the field of psychology are used to inform an understanding of memory for this research project:

- Narrative
- Episodic
- Semantic
- Autobiographic
- Flashbulb

These categories will be expanded on in the Context chapter, 2 as they form part of the memory framework that bounds the investigation. This expanded definition will include issues such as ‘trauma’, ‘sporadic event fragmenting’, ‘created images’, ‘constructed memories’, ‘re-enacting and gradual transitioning’ which are all pertinent to the theoretical context for the paintings.

Vestige Objects

The research strategy tests the potential of an object to communicate, within a pictorial context, narratives that bring the workings of memory into conscious recollection. The objects used in this research became an intensely and critically examined group derived from a left over and never cherished collection of items from my family ancestry. These objects were gathered for studio testing, each being imbued with family history, all with utilitarian value and acting as triggers in the painting composition that allowed me to reflect on a period of penury, diaspora and trauma within previous generations of my family. I refer to these items as vestige objects, and I am the heritor. These ‘forms’ have proved useful as subject foils and narrative links with remembered interior spaces and landscape. The objects are remnant, ancestral tokens of reminiscence. The vestige objects are of no particular monetary value and have survived more out of luck and utilitarian value than any special care or consideration.

The objects found use the domestic setting that belied their original function. This adaptability probably ensured their survival. Interestingly, all of these objects were manufactured in countries other than Australia. Each one has an exotic story attached to its provenance, invested over several generations with hyperbole and fiction; each object has a memory link to childhood and is used as an active element and participant in compositional development. The purpose of each object in a group or individually is to provide a Gestalt effect in the reading of the painting. The success of the paintings relies upon relationships between

objects and the remembered space; this sum being greater than just representation of the objects as parts alone. For this project, I used the following vestige objects:

- 1902 pattern British bayonet. 22 inch blade. Sheffield steel, circa 1917
- Dewars marching highlander. Slip cast ceramic, circa 1960
- New Guinea Highland phallocrypt (penis gourd), circa 1944
- Family bible, King James Version. Scottish, with bullet hole, 1917
- Pocketbook, Robbie Burns poems, circa 1970
- *Log of the Cutty Sark*, circa 1938
- *Star Wars* Naboo fighter. Model, circa 1995
- Gurkha kukri (fighting knife), circa 1915

The paintings are about concrete things, represented as such and brought together through vignettes of remembered spaces, people and events in uncertain ways. In collage and painting-schema, the surrealist ‘interior reality of self’ is swamped by the ‘exterior reality’ of the verifiable contextualised in the remembered- the work hangs on the mystery of things rather than of the mind. At stake in my project is the potential for a representational trope, imitation, to compromise the evocation or spirit of the subject of research. Remembered spaces, figures, interiors and landscape are seen and experienced during childhood and, as remembered elements, are sensed and used in ways to activate dialogue with the real objects within the composition. The real objects are repositories of the past that represent the trauma of diaspora, penury and war.

Overview of the Exegesis

In this section I briefly discuss the context of my research, and the methodologies I employed in the studio testing for the project. I begin with representation as it is the key pictorial strategy leading to painting. The use of objects imbued with trauma leads me to examine Jill Bennett's reflection on trauma and how fiction and fantasy can visually register experience of traumatic memory. The work of Maurice Halbwachs offers insights into existential questions relating to the physical objects of our daily contact and notions of permanence and stability. Clinical and philosophical writing that co-act for 'making' methodologies are derived from the work of van der Kolk and Laplanche and Pontalis. The presence of representation in the works referred to in the Context chapter, 2 is a key determining factor for their inclusion in the exegesis. I introduce these significant artists briefly here to point out how their work has conceptual and practical influence on project outcomes. This will be explained in detail in the Context chapter, 2

Representation

Representing the vague memories of places, spaces, objects and people is critical to my project aims and has led me to investigate the work of artists who have pioneered ways of representing the above subjects. I acknowledge the key role of memory in the history of painting, particularly in its practice. The act of developing a preparatory sketch for a later painting has mnemonic value; particularly in the way choices are made in media selection for the capturing of

detail important for later embellishment in the representation of, in my case, vestige objects. This research bends toward a specific question in the mnemonics of painting practice. What can be recovered in painting from ones early childhood memory when actual objects, from that time, are painted truthfully, and placed strategically in vaguely remembered contexts from that same time?

Within my methodological framework I developed drawing, collage and painting compositions that test the juxtaposition of heirloom objects and or figures within remembered 1960s and 1970s interior/exterior spaces, creating a highly charged evocation of the time, and the places, people and spaces of my childhood. All incorporate photographic imagery from that time as a source of subjects and offer methodological challenges in (their) representation as archival photographic elements in compositional structures. Ian Farr describes the ethereal, haunting evocation that exists in the memories of place (landscape) and space that I have pursued in the paintings:

The soil in which chance had sown the human plant was of no importance. And against this background of nothingness human values grow. Something unreal seeps into the reality of the recollections that are on the borderline between our own personal history and an indefinite pre-history, in the exact place where, after us, the childhood comes to life in us. For before us it was quite anonymous. It was a place that was lost in the world. Thus, on the threshold of our space, before the era of our own time, we hover

between awareness of being and loss of being. And the entire reality of memory becomes spectral. (Farr 2012, p. 60)

My strategies for representation are dependent on compositional devices, some of which are legacies from the Renaissance, others from ground-breaking modes of representation pioneered in the early 20th century, and are described in the Context chapter, 2 and referred to in the Methodology chapter.

Regarding representation, McAuliffe (2015, p. 81) writes: ‘In painting, Representation is always a form of surrogacy, always a set of marks standing in for something else.’ In my work surrogacy is announced by tabletop props. The challenge for painting is the representation of vestige objects which evoke the traumas of their former owners. Placing objects together or alone on picture planes, sometimes tabletops, presents viewers with immediate and uncomplicated ‘presentations’ of objects, often depicted with clinical precision, all touchstones in acts of remembering intended to offer plausible pictorial scenarios.

Picasso, one hundred years ago, challenged many of the conventions of realism that had prevailed since the Renaissance and forever changed the way in which objects exist in illusionary space on a two-dimensional surface. The objects in his compositions reveal multiple viewpoints collectively creating ‘the’ object. Furthermore, his objects are made up of fragments of memories relevant to the subject, creating existentially profound meaning.

Since the early 20th century, and as a result of Cubism, many painters who use representation have employed processes that are developments of Picasso’s

Analytical and Synthetic Cubist style. Robert Rauschenberg, Richard Hamilton, Dexter Dalwood and James Lynch are painters who have developed strategies to create pictorial mélanges using dislocation in their various lexicons, all of which quote Picasso to a greater or lesser extent. These painters will be discussed in following chapters. Their work and its 'frame' provide valuable material for the development of working methods and of theoretical underpinnings for research. The point of difference in my research is that I placed real objects in remembered spaces. Transferring composition is part of the difficult re-visioning in the step from collage to painting. Objects were placed on 'sightlines' carefully positioned in an attempt to create palpable connections between the verified and the remembered.

The Contextual Dimensions of the Project

An aim of the investigation was to make paintings that articulate the workings of memory, specifically relating to childhood. This is important to the research in as much as it is from childhood that the 'pool of rememberings' and reflective vignettes arise. The 'memory grabs' are fractured and fragmentary, my memories are not characterised as a flowing seamless whole but rather comprise a fictitious, discontinuous and illogical recounting, an inventive vision to be shaped by constructed parts in my painting.

This proposition is tested by reflecting on my own childhood and formative years. For the purposes of this research 'formative' and 'childhood'

refer to the early stages of psychological development when a child's memory is not fully formed: images and events cannot be adequately recalled until a later stage. Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that children will remember episodic events and images from relatively early points in their development, even though it is generally understood that children do not begin to form narrative memories until after the age of three (van der Kolk 2010):

Childhood is a critical time in the construction of beliefs about self, sometimes referred to as core beliefs. Core beliefs are the very essence of how we see ourselves, other people, the world and the future. Such beliefs develop during childhood and through the undergoing of significant life events or particular life experiences. Core beliefs in early childhood closely mirror parental values and it is argued that the neuroses of primary carers/parents are absorbed into the psyche of the child at this stage. These beliefs are strongly held, rigid and inflexible opinions that are maintained by the tendency to focus on information that supports the belief and to ignore evidence that contradicts it. (Centre for Clinical Interventions 2008, p. 3)

The apparent inescapability of these beliefs formed in childhood and their associated memories are background, and motivation for their selection and evaluation of subjects in my paintings.

The Context chapter, 2 will examine the theoretical underpinnings of the project, drawing on aspects of psychological definitions of memory.

An examination of these theoretical domains helps me understand and select a range of painters whose works constitute the Context chapter, 2 of this exegesis. There exists an analogous relationship between certain clinical definitions of memory and methodologies in the ‘making’ of this project.

The project is partially shaped by the contextual elements of historical and contemporary painters whose work in some way reflects and parallels my project aims. This project proposes that the impact of parental neurosis on a child’s core beliefs can be contained, symbolically, in inherited vestige objects. The three cornerstones of my ancestral neurosis derive from my father’s parent’s emigration from Scotland and its fracturing cultural impact, the effects of the Great Depression (and resulting penury), and the residual impact of the Great War (and its enduring legacy of loss/bereavement, physical and psychological trauma) on my mother’s parents.

Many painters have responded to their autobiographical traumas, often reflecting their contemporary world and time in history. This research highlights key painters whose work deals specifically with trace trauma from previous family generations and this will be expanded upon in the Context chapter, 2. The chapter will discuss several artists whose work deals with aspects of trauma generated to varying degrees by migration, penury and catastrophic world events. The pool of artists considered is drawn from contemporary Australian and international practitioners.

In particular, the work of Imants Tillers posed many questions of national identity because of his parents’ emigration to Australia as refugees after World

War Two. The coming together of disparate cultures as a result of this marks a significant part of the stories of Australia in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Significance and relevance is critical to and for the outcomes of this research.

The Context chapter, 2 discusses works that have significance in the ways they exemplify the evocative potency of trauma, memory, banal objects and interior spaces in collage and painting. Examination of work by Albert Tucker and Imants Tillers provides a perspective on trauma and diaspora respectively. Paintings by Matthias Weischer and Dexter Dalwood are used to discuss the relationship between pictorial ‘interior space’ and memory. Historical perspectives on still life and collage in the work of Picasso and Braque are contrasted with a contemporary collaging of ‘tabletop’ space in the work of James Lynch.

Methodology

My studio testing involved direct contact to paper drawing and the construction of collages in preparation for painting. Much of my subject selection and strategizing for painting developed in these engagements, and the Methodology chapter, 3 will elaborate on these phases. Transferring composition is part of the difficult revising in the step from drawing and collage to painting. Objects are placed on sight lines, carefully positioned in an attempt at creating powerful connections between the verified and the remembered. Objects have their own meaning; by collaging I aim to conflate meaning and then by painting ‘reintroduce’ and reveal how the objects are better read as ‘objects of trauma’.

The Methodology chapter, 3 will also detail the painting strategies that were employed to create the moods, atmospheres or states that pertain to the very particular character of this memorist painting project. I define these moods associated with unease and trauma as:

Miasma: an unwholesome or oppressive atmosphere, a dangerous foreboding

Soporific stillness: sleep-inducing, sometimes used to describe boring, dull experiences

(Soporific stillness refers both to childhood memories of the ennui of country life in the 1960s, self medication with analgesic powders, alcohol, and the effects of gas from war on relatives. Furthermore, the use of sleeping gas as a soporific agent in Marvel Comic genre of the 1960s)

Melancholia: pronounced depression with feelings of foreboding

Remembered domestic interiors of the 1960s and 1970s provide contextual spaces for the placement of vestige objects and produce an important trope of memory narrative, creating 'haunting' interior spaces. A further aim is to locate these interior spaces in a partially observed landscape (possibly seen through a window or vignette). Locating these works in geographical space as well as interiors is an important element in the picturing of remembered childhood events, which are generally indistinct and fleeting.

Another methodology involved testing and applying visual and tactile spatial organisation in preparatory studies for painting. Experiments with collage test the use of vestige objects, inserted and positioned against the surrounding

proliferation of remembered 1960s and 1970s interiors and landscape vignettes. I propose that the mystique of vestige objects used in compositions act as ‘visual touchstones’ for the formal, the spectral and the phantasmagoric.

Early in the studio work I aimed to construct preparatory studies in the form of paper based collage. Tests involved the bringing together of disparate elements. These studies are used within a form of stagecraft to compose a suite of paintings, born from collage, describing a pictorial *mélange* of narrative where subject is both precise and ungraspable, and where objects embodied a plastic power emanating from shapes that retained an obstinate visual integrity. The aim has been to establish oppositions between ordering and remembering, exemplifying and sensation. The ‘flatbed’ horizontal working process of Robert Rauschenberg and the application of the more contemporary ‘desktop shuffle’ have influenced the processes in this research and are discussed in both the Context, 2 and Methodology chapters, 3. In this project the construction of collage on the ‘horizontal’, the innovative compositional workings of Synthetic Cubism and the evaluation of painters’ work that reflects these innovations is the foundation of a painterly language that deals with and challenges ‘orders of experience’ in picture making.

Finally, the Conclusion chapter, 4 reflects on the impact of theories and related contextual frames in the shaping of the project. The research findings are discussed and related directly to the initial aims of the project. The successes and challenges are outlined, evaluating the final body of work as the culmination of the research undertakings.

Chapter 2 – Context, Theory/Artistic

This chapter provides a theoretical and artistic framework that establishes the importance to the project of memory, of the resonance of trauma symbolically held in heirloom objects, and of notions of time and place. ‘Place’ here is defined as a vaguely remembered landscape and its translation into painting. Testing the relevance of these concepts to my research practice was of primary concern in the studio investigation. My research project is a personal reflection on the age of ‘coming into being’ as a formed individual. It is about finding a painterly way of expressing that time when a person slowly becomes aware, spatially, temporally and linguistically, of their surroundings and of their relationship to others.

There are three theoretical domains considered in this project: the defining of relevant categories of memory; the development of objects’ interiors/landscape vignettes as active contexts; and an exploration of the role that landscape can play in the representation of childhood memories. These domains have influenced the painting strategies adopted and have also guided the development of the artistic context.

In regard to the artistic context, I focused on the work of seven painters categorised into four groups. These artists, and their employment of painting methodologies and selection of subject matter, have direct bearing on the themes of this research project. The themes and their artists are:

1. Societal Trauma

- Albert Tucker; painting the lived experience

- Imants Tillers; next generation diaspora

2. Interior Spaces

- Dexter Dalwood; traumatic histories and collage-inspired painting
- Matthias Weischer; atmospheres and ‘retro’ interior spaces

3. Collage and Objects

- Pablo Picasso; challenging renaissance representation
- George Braque; relationships between objects and their contextual space

4. Image ‘Pulp’ and the Reproduced Image in Painting

- James Lynch; conflating the fragmented and the disconnected

Defining Relevant Categories of Memory

There is no question that memory is not a simple matter of the recovery of things and events ‘as they really happened’. My research argument is that painting contributes to the representation of childhood memory, revealing memory’s shortcomings and failures just as much as its recall of astute observation. Painting is good at visualising the indeterminate workings of memory, how we imagine, construct, and represent ourselves and our personal histories. Memories of early childhood are critical to an adult understanding of the core beliefs about self that are generally understood to have been formed at this time.

Some key ‘clinical descriptions’ of remembering are outlined below.

These include: semantic, narrative, autobiographical, flashbulb and traumatic memory. These particular definitions help evaluate the types of recall I use as I

‘remember’ my childhood, and have also provided cues for some of the painting methods. These descriptions of memory are aligned with the work of the artists pertinent to this project.

The life and work of Albert Tucker significantly informs my work as a painter, particularly the impact that trauma in his early life had on the subjects of his later compositions. Categorising clinical definitions of memory has helped me understand the psychological states of the human subjects of Tucker’s paintings and has afforded me a layman’s understanding of *his* psychological state, influenced as it was by the accumulation of events that made up his life experiences. A working understanding of the definitions of episodic and autobiographical memory has simultaneously helped me evaluate Tucker’s motivation/subject pool, and locate the origins and significance of my own childhood memories for the project.

Episodic memory (Reber, Allen & Reber 2009) describes our recollection of experiences and specific events in time in serial form. From these we can reconstruct the events that took place at given points in our lives. Individuals tend to see themselves as actors in these events, and the emotional charge and the entire context surrounding the events are usually parts of the memory, not just the bare facts of the events themselves. Aspects of this kind of memory, such as ‘emotional charge’ and ‘context surrounding an event’, are particularly analogous to colour and tone choices in painting, as well as subject selection and the use of collage in constructing composition.

Autobiographical memory (Centre for Clinical Interventions 2008) is sometimes distinguished, from other forms of memory, although really it is just one aspect of episodic memory. Autobiographical memories are of episodes recollected from an individual's own life, often based on a combination of episodic memory (personal experiences and specific objects, people and events experienced at particular times and places) and semantic memory (general knowledge and facts about the world).

1 – Societal Trauma

The work of Albert Tucker and Imants Tillers speaks very strongly to the long-held beliefs about subjects and methods in painting that engaged me as a young painter. Both painters represent what I consider to be the social concerns that characterise particular times in Australian history. Tucker's work, for instance, speaks to my ancestral world of penury and the trauma of war. My research explores the ways that objects (that have survived the traumatic ructions of poverty and war) are used in pictorial composition.

Tucker claimed that his greatest anxieties were established and embedded during his childhood. The spectre of his grandparents' wealth and status haunted his impoverished parents, contributing greatly to their social anxiety; this was transferred to Tucker himself. His own neurosis is evidenced and manifested in his use of the transformed figure, symbolist approaches to repeated motifs, and his social observations against a background of penury and war (Hughes 1994). His association with émigré artists such as Danila Vassilieff intensified and

complemented Tucker's subject preoccupation, European-style and emotionally charged 'painterliness'.

The power and anger of Tucker's imagination in the war years is seen in *Victory Girls* (1945). At that time, he was employed at the Heidelberg Military



Fig. 1 Albert Tucker, *Victory Girls* 1943

Hospital to illustrate the injuries of the soldiers awaiting plastic surgery. Tucker was particularly struck by the savage commentary of the German artists George Grosz, Otto Dix and Max Beckmann. The heads of the teenage prostitutes in *Victory Girls* are reduced to schematised

features: blonde hair, mascaraed eyelashes, piggy nostrils and a gash of red lipstick for crescent-shaped mouths. Similarly their bodies consist only of Picasso-like breasts and ribs above flaring striped skirts.

The irony of the patriotic colours and American motifs is glaring in this morality tale of sexual corruption and social decay. The directness of the work emphasises the immediacy and passion of his response to the situation. He uses bold brushstrokes for the essential forms and for the reaching arms and hands of the soldiers. The simple stripes of the skirts and teeth parallel the violence of the red mouths.

To fully appreciate the work of Imants Tillers within the context of this research, the following explanation of semantic memory (Reber, Allen & Reber 2009) is useful. Like Tillers, I come from a family of migrants. My childhood memories are of wistful elder relations with funny accents, their homelands lionised in songs and festivals celebrating a place far removed from the harsh rural setting of my childhood. The ‘acquired facts’ that are the basis of semantic memory are crucial memory tropes: subjects of which are found in Tillers’ work and which also constitute much of the ‘background’ space of my collage and paintings.



Fig. 2 Imants Tillers, *Diaspora* 1992

Semantic memory is a structured record of facts, meanings, concepts and knowledge about the external world that we have acquired. It refers to the general factual spatial/temporal context in which it was acquired. Semantic memories may once have had a personal context but now stand alone as simple knowledge. For example, such things as social customs, the understanding of mathematics and the functions of objects are all semantic memories. Semantic memories are generally derived from episodic memory, in as much as we learn new facts or concepts from

experience and episodic memory is considered to support and underpin semantic memory.

Tillers' work informs my research interest in the legacy of migrations and the stories of the 20th century. His painting *Diaspora* (1992) deals with the dislocation of people from their homelands and within their own homelands (often brought about by others' colonisation). The coming together of disparate cultures as a result of this makes up a significant part of the stories of Australia in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Tillers' work itself is loaded with symbolic references to mysticism and pacifist aspiration. It includes many references – fragments of images, words and symbols – from more than twenty works of art by eleven artists from different historical periods and from different cultures. Symbols stand in for the Latvian language that was suppressed during the Russian occupation. Structurally the painting utilises a grid formation to tether the disparate range of imagery (painted on small boards), and becomes a metaphor for his family's fractured ancestral memories, and, by association, his own. Tillers grew up with the view that the fate of the Latvians was to be subsumed by a colonising culture, resulting in the suppression of language and customs. To a lesser extent, this loss of cultural identity is similar to that of my forebears.

In a broader context Tillers is interested in poetic, evocative ways to convey recurring cycles of loss and new beginnings and a need to acknowledge diverse voices. In many ways Tillers' use of symbols informs my research strategies not for compositional subjects but as a reminder of the time of my

childhood. Most refugee Latvian migrants were escaping Russian occupation; (their) paranoia and fatalism fascinated me as a child living under the threat of imminent nuclear holocaust. The ‘outsider’ presence of Latvians neighbours (including Tiller’s family) in my early life helped shape a way of thinking, and, by referring to the work of Imants Tillers, helps evoke ways of picturing diasporic moods.

Though Tillers’ work often refers to international diaspora. My interest in diaspora relates, by contrast, to the ‘case study’ of a family and to an inwards reflection on memories from childhood. One research interest is the trauma imbued in vestige objects and how this trauma ‘speaks’ in composition that is constructed of imagery of fleeting and uncertain memories of childhood. The traumatic pain of diaspora is communicated by me through objects, rather than the symbols used by Tillers. His use of the matrix grid of small boards is paralleled by my methodology of collage apprising subject and compositional structures in painting.

Probably the most relevant category of memory for the composing of subjects for memorist evocation is flashbulb memory (Reber, Allen &, Reber 2009). The analogue communication devices of the ‘60s and ‘70s delivered the traumatic news of the deaths of relatives, of war (particularly ‘live’ footage of the Vietnam conflict), and, curiously in my memory, the ‘news flash’ moment of the death of Prime Minister Harold Holt. A looming television rendered in black and white appears in a late project painting; this is the device

that communicated ‘news flash’ moments that are now powerful flashbulb memories of my childhood.

Later in this chapter I discuss Lacan and Freud’s theories on the infatuation that small children have with myth and national leaders. Their theories can help explain why particular memories are so singular and vivid. The Flashbulb Memory of the drowning of Harold Holt is an example of this in my adult consciousness. Flashbulb memory is the most significant memory trope for my adult reflection on childhood years. Such memories are believed by some to be highly resistant to forgetting, possibly due to the strong emotions that are associated with them. Flashbulb memories are not especially accurate, despite often being experienced with great vividness.

For painting, ‘memory-traces’ (or the more pronounced flashbulb memories) are simply signifiers in complex and mobile relations with other signifiers. It is a characteristic of our memory, Freud observed, that:

The reproduction of our lives is a connected chain of events it begins only from the sixth or seventh year onwards – in many cases only after the tenth year. On the one hand, memories of occurrences before these years tend to be fragmentary and unrelated to each other.

Moreover, they rarely seem to concern events of any real importance.

(Farr 2012, p. 181)

The earliest memories we have, according to Freud:

Often possess a vivid sensory intensity that more recent memories usually lack. Our childhood memories show us our earliest years not

as they were but as they appeared at the later periods when the memories were aroused. In these periods of arousal, the childhood memories did not, as people are accustomed to say, *emerge* they were *formed* at that time. And a number of motives, with no concern for historical accuracy, had a part in forming them, as well as in the selection of the memories themselves. (Farr 2012, p. 181)

Lacan, quoted in Burgin (1994, p. 177), speaks of the small child's 'prodigious porosity to everything in myth, legend, fairy tales, history, the ease with which he/she lets him/herself be invaded by these stories'. Freud's essay of 1908, 'Family Romances', is about the childhood fantasy that one's family is not one's real family. 'The commonest of these imaginative romances,' he writes, is 'the replacement of both parents or of the father alone by grander people' (Farr 2012, p. 180). The family romance however is almost infinitely various: '...its many-sidedness and its great range of applicability enable it to meet every sort of requirement' (Farr 2012, p. 182). The nostalgia for the relational world of earliest childhood is at the root of family romances. In the eyes of the child its parents are all powerful. The 'grander people' apparently substituted for the father or mother in later fantasies are merely the same parents as they originally appeared to the child. Maturity brings the knowledge that one's parents are not omnipotent. Their idealised images are, however, not abandoned but displaced. National leaders and other figures in positions of authority or caring may be unconsciously identified with the ideal parent. As expressions like 'motherland' and 'fatherland' imply, nationalism itself is a beneficiary of feelings originally directed towards the

parents: ‘The childhood memories of individuals come in general to acquire the significance of ‘screen memories’ and in doing so offer a remarkable analogy with the childhood memories that a nation preserves in its store of legends and myths’ (Farr 2012, p. 181).

Given the variety and complexity of these different modes of memory, of the fragmentary recollection of childhood memory, and of the alignment of key figures from childhood with the notion of a national identity, it became important for me to find ways in which my studio work could contain this complexity in the visual field. My flashbulb memories from childhood are etched indelibly in my consciousness and have the easiest and most visceral recall for the background contextual spaces of the 1960s and 1970s.

Narrative memory (Reber, Allen & Reber 2009) is a useful category of memory, generally used as a counselling therapy, as the following definition describes. Nevertheless, the application of narrative memory as a way of interpreting the works of Dexter Dalwood has been a useful strategy for the project and one that has been helpful in gaining a limited understanding of the psychological nature of the ‘figures’ of my remembered past. Dalwood has recreated interior spaces of significant events from history: their titles giving away or encrypting clues as to human engagement that took place, as a result of, or in an indifference to the physical setting. Dalwood’s use of collage has been an important influence for my approach and is discussed at length in my Methodology chapter.

The recreation of narrative memory can be used as a counselling strategy for sufferers of post-traumatic stress disorder. Narrative memory is a way for trauma survivors to make sense of their experiences in their current situation. The survivor substitutes 'creative images' and 'constructed memories' for the real memories that are too painful to bring to mind. The real fragments of the traumatic event are pushed to the bottom of the



Fig. 3 Dexter Dalwood, *Herman Melville* 2005

'memory system' where they can only be remembered through the stimulus provided by a question or a certain situation. Narrative memory is different from traumatic memory. While narrative memory allows the remembering of the trauma through such stimuli as questions or remarks, traumatic memory is evoked by conditions similar to those of the original experience, causing the sufferer to experience the traumatic event again, from the beginning to the end.

Typically, the contemporary English painter Dexter Dalwood depicts imagined, constructed interiors and landscapes usually devoid of figures to act as invented depictions of real historic figures, places or moments. They draw on the idea of 'history painting' as a genre and can be elusive and highly codified. His

works have an immediacy and power as paintings first and foremost. His subjects are drawn from traumatic histories and events that have become lodged in our collective cultural unconscious. In this way, Dalwood offers critical and important parallels to my own approach to painting: he begins with small collages used to inform large scale canvases with abrupt disjunctures, often sharp, clinical edges, faithfully reproducing the jarring qualities of the collage.

Take, for an example, the painting *Herman Melville*. This is a painting that contains tabletop objects in a claustrophobic ship's cabin. *Herman Melville* is a painting typical of Dalwood's working process. Evident in the composition are the elements and devices of collage, juxtaposed, heaped, each element seemingly representing a colour or tone. A table, set for a meal, occupies the lower half of the composition. The corner of the table protrudes forward and has been drawn in such a way that the last run of its surface drops, creating a flattened, almost two-dimensional shape that invites a fast visual leap to the setting of the plates, bottles and candelabra.

Above the table swings a ship's lantern. Both candles and lantern only provide illumination enough for positive spaces to cast shadows. The light allows the chroma of the blues and reds that dominate as formal shapes to glow in an understated way. These formal shapes make up what appear to be arbitrary positive spaces that are placed between the readable functional space of the cabin and the still life setting on the table. The orange colour of the table and porthole harmonise with the complimentary blues, mostly cobalts, of the heaped and clumped arbitrary spaces of the painting's middle. Black and white are used for

punctuation, black to 'bookend' the composition on the bottom left and right. A 'sea sickly' dull and light pea-green holds the deeper space of the interior, representing an archway and the heavy scantlings of the tumblehome section of the ship's beam.

The heavy repetition of the ellipses of the plates on the table, and the way in which the scale of the ellipses reduces into a deeper space, are devices that direct a viewing of the painting to the awkward and clunkily-treated area beyond the considered layout of the table setting.

Objects mingle in a constructed zone of the verifiable and the fantasised. Colour competes with tonal orchestration in a 'dead heat' for the dominant compositional device for moving the eye through and around the work. I feel this is a more successful compositional strategy in the painting than the 'fast space' of the table. Superb painterly balance exists between the sharp and defined and the brevity in mark-making. This oscillation between different pictorial styles and references creates a space in which the viewer similarly oscillates between the recognition (or remembering) of the references 'outside' the painting and the unique pictorial event in front of them.

This oscillation between the remembered and the actual is something that I have focused on in this project. Like Dalwood, I use tabletop props, variation of edges on the apparently collaged fragments, and the contrast of brush-mark making to amplify difference.

Dalwood has discussed his attitude towards the relationship of collage to painting. He makes important distinctions between the painting and the collage,

stating that he “wanted to invent a bit of painting in response to the collaged element” (Coggins 2010, p.3). This parallels my own concerns when transcribing the collage into painting. Dalwood also states that the “paintings change from the collage quite a bit in terms of colour, and sometimes a reference can change” (Coggins 2010, p. 33). In short Dalwood indicates here that whilst collage informs composition and the starting points for painting, the painting quickly departs from the source to become something unique.

2 – Interior Spaces

Destitution, not only social but architectonic, the poverty of interiors, enslaved and enslaving objects – can be suddenly transformed into revolutionary nihilism... They bring the immense force of ‘atmosphere’ concealed in these things to the point of explosion. (Benjamin 1929, p. 20)

Our physical surroundings bear our and others’ imprint. Our home – furniture and its arrangement, room décor –



Fig. 4 Matthias Weischer, *Chair* 2003

recalls family and friends whom we see frequently in this setting. The interior, or more specifically the remembered interior of childhood, is the desired setting for the majority of the subject matter in this project. Our tastes and desires evidenced

in the choice and arrangement of ‘things’ in this space is explained in large measure by the bonds attaching us to various groups. However, furniture, ornaments, pictures, utensils and knick-knacks also circulate within the ‘group’: they provide insights into new directions of fashion and taste and recall for us older customs and social distinctions.

What is involved here is not merely harmony and physical congruence between place and person. Rather, each object appropriately placed in the whole recalls a time in history that is specific to the individual. Furniture and décor signify ‘tastes of an era’ and speak to the social ‘class’ of my forebears. It’s the placement of the vestige objects in remembered space where potent memorist evocation exists for the project.

Matthias Weischer’s paintings have been an influence as the project has developed – particularly his handling of atmosphere and the ‘another time’ feel of his work. He uses odd combinations of objects derived from a life seemingly lived just before the time of recent memory. In his painting *Interior* (1995) we see an unremarkable chair occupying a space slightly pre-dating the painting. Weischer refers to these paintings as ‘fragile containers of the past’ that preserve the memory of vulnerable materials threatened by our contemporary throwaway culture. In this way, ornament becomes evidence of the transience of beauty; these ornamental surfaces coexist with others from different eras, creating a tableau of aged, fragile patterns that serve as simultaneous quotations of different eras of taste in design.

Determining specific meaning is anathema to Weischer, who prefers to

liberate these objects from meaning by attempting to dissolve any relationship between signifier and signified. Weischer's work reveals an indebtedness to the automatic processes and verbal-visual strategies codified by the Surrealists and taken up by successive generations of artists.

Objects Interiors/Landscape Vignettes as Active Contexts

Maurice Halbwachs (1925, p. 47), in his essay 'Space and the collective Memory', states that:

The physical objects of our daily contact change little or not at all, providing us with an image of permanence and stability. They give us a feeling of order and tranquillity, like a silent and immobile society unconcerned with our own restlessness and change of mood.

This project explores the potential of an object to communicate, within a painted context, narratives that bring the workings of memory into the visual realm. Whilst the vestige objects are concrete, unchanging forms, what lives for me in them is the spectral, the unburied persistence of a traumatic past. The objects were triggers to conjure up spectral narrative constructs of recollected perceptions, interpretations and truth-values that then find representational form in the paintings that make up this project. For me, the most frequently registered trope in memory activation is a kind of haunting. The vestige objects have a haunting presence in as much as I have been haunted *by* their presence; they have uncannily survived the deaths of owners and subsequent cleanouts. They came

into my ownership by default rather than design. Their presence in my memory is peripheral, in itself a haunting or lurking presence.

My aim has been to reanimate my vestige objects' histories, to give them a reimagined place in the remembered spaces of childhood. They have a real and symbolic meaning in the context of this project. Their presence and placement in these imagined spaces is central to the image construction of paintings. They are focal points with a stabilising role within the works. At the same time they are tangible evidence of a now-remembered past, and as such they play a vital part in my reassembling of the narrative events of that past. At the symbolic level, then, they can be seen as waypoints or markers in the establishment of the narrator's history and of his/her knowledge of the world.

Halbwachs (1925, p. 48) argues:

The permanence and interior appearance of a home impose on the group a comforting image of its own continuity. The group not only transforms the space into which it has been inserted, but also yields and adapts to its physical surroundings. It becomes enclosed within the framework it has built. The group's image of its external milieu and its stable relationships with this environment becomes paramount in the idea it forms of itself, permeating every element of its consciousness, moderating and governing its evolution.

In terms of my project, this once stable environment is now only partially accessible because of the vagaries of memory. The 'thing' that is now stable is the vestige object. The picturing of remembered spaces of childhood and painting

from real objects are conflated via the tool of collage in ways that seek to frame the workings of narrative memory. The interior scenes of the paintings, constructed from memory, give a location for the objects while snippets of landscape give an indication of a geographic location in which the childhood memories were formed. Landscape acts as a locational, and occasional, pictorial device. Though secondary, it is an important compositional element. A landscape ‘glimpse’ signifies a geographical location of childhood.

In contrast, appropriated fragments of landscapes by Russell Drysdale were used in early work in this project. The popularity of painters such as Drysdale attests to the harsh and uncompromising nature of the Australian outback, perpetuating the myths of a pioneering age made famous by the poetry of Henry Lawson. These poems were my ‘rote’ oral history in childhood, and the prints of Russell Drysdale constitute the peripheral rememberings of the walls of home and school. They constitute a powerful remembrance from the archive and present evocative and visceral imagery. This imagery allows a ‘slippage’ into, and out of, the actual landscape vignette and ‘desktop’ compositional ‘play’ of other collaged interiors.

3 – Collage and Objects

Collage has been a useful process in the planning for painting and has allowed me to combine direct drawing with photographic elements. The direct forces of cutting, tearing, ripping and spontaneous placing of drawn and photographed shards have helped unlock compositional outcomes.

An examination of the earliest practitioner of collage and the philosophy and methods that underpin that artist's work highlight notions of the history of 'self' in a contemporary societal context and as an encapsulation of place in time. Picasso's *papier collés* of 1912-1914 act as harbingers of the coming catastrophe of European war. *Bottle of Suze* (1928) is a later composition in this genre that shows the simple elements of an austere still life. The composition has a vortex feel in as much as the eye is constantly drawn to the centre: the axis of shapes slightly off-set, adding to this effect.



Fig. 5 Pablo Picasso, *Bottle of Suze* 1928

Picasso has used newsprint for background tone and two-dimensional texture: the poor archival quality of newsprint ages quickly and suddenly relegates the story to the same decayed 'history' as itself. This methodology has memorist implications: the aging newsprint assists in making 'historical' the event described in the newspaper article itself. I use aged photography, degraded images that, recreated in painting, help establish instantly recognisable imagery from the past. Baldassari (2000, p. 107) states that:

Picasso sometimes used old newspapers, such paper that had a

distinctly different colour from a contemporary newspaper and the brownish tone might in itself have attracted him as a variation on the usual white paper ground.

Rosenblum (1971, pp. 604-606) goes on:

The artist here would deliberately have taken advantage of the chromatic specificity of newsprint, its constitutive fragility, its extreme photosensitivity resulting in the fact that time confers a plastic and coloured value upon it which cannot be imitated by traditional artistic means. The dark tones, the dead leaves and lifeless newspaper pages work in harmony with the imitation wood grain and or sky blue grounds.

Such interest in the vulnerability of visual material could be compared to Picasso's penchant for the photography of the previous century, the artist having made a crucial contribution to the genesis of pictorial monochromy in his 'blue' and 'pink' periods. The chromatic attenuation that light creates in photographic substances, as well as on paper, results in a sepia toning that can easily be read as a sign of passing time. Much of the representation of my interest in a 'time remembered' relies on the photographic elements and free painterly passages in my work to reflect a 'time past'. The degraded photographic shard of the collage and the challenge to preserve (its) effect in painting is of uppermost importance to my studio tests. In this respect Picasso's use of newsprint has been influential for my research.

Torn, ripped cut and hacked collage elements, in the very violence of their

making, parallel historical traumas. Inverting ‘readable’ shards creates a dysrhythmic ‘flow’ in Picasso’s work and challenges interpretations of it. The two pieces of wallpaper in *Bottle of Suze*, cut and pasted crudely, and upside down, have a domestic charm. Benign elements such as these can depower significance, except for the way in which their design can be taken to refer to a specific time in history. This was a compositional strategy important to early work in my project. Picasso said:

We tried to get rid of *trompe l’oeil* to find a *trompe l’esprit*... We didn’t any longer want to fool the eye, we wanted to fool the mind. The sheet of newspaper was never used to make a newspaper... this displaced object has entered a universe for which it was not made and where it retains, in a measure, its strangeness. And this ‘strangeness’ was what we wanted to make people think about because we were quite aware that our world was becoming very strange and not exactly reassuring. (Gilot & Lake 1964, p. 77)

The ‘strange’ and ‘not exactly reassuring’ are traits of the trope of memory and the haunting qualities of the vestige objects. Getting the considered placement of these objects right in this body of work has been a central concern, and Picasso’s exemplary object placement, especially in the collages, has been an important influence.

George Braque, like Picasso, made *papier collés* to inform compositional structures for painting. He had used the theme of the mantelpiece or pedestal table laden with objects in his early career and returned to it in 1927. At this time he

brought the distortion and geometric structures that had been the hallmarks of the development of Cubism in the early 1900s to his work: 'Visual space separates objects from one another. Tactile space separates us from objects' (Cogniat 1980, p. 114).

The theme of the pedestal tabletop as a 'stage' for objects is clearly evident and forward in the composition. *The Gueridon*, which has a congested



Fig. 6 George Braque, *The Gueridon* 1928

central zone surrounded by a lighter or darker perimeter that pushes the walls back to form a separate area that bears down forcefully on the floor.

Notwithstanding its numerous oblique lines, it shows Braque's continuing search for static appearance looming out from the surrounding proliferation: objects reduced to elemental forms assure

the survival of some measure of objective reality.

In transforming commonplace objects, Braque articulated a vision of the material world, choosing the still life above all other themes because it lent itself so effortlessly to the freest sorts of transpositions and could thereby adapt itself to the individual artist. This painting, the ways in which Braque filled different portions of its canvas, is an interesting example of the idea that visual space

separates objects from one another. The central zone and the perimeter work, along with the third area formed by the legs of the table, have been treated as a flat shape.

The very dark tone of the table legs gives an appearance of weightiness, thereby adding to the forceful sense of a gravity-bound form against the floor. Even though each of these two areas corresponds to a specific distance and tactile sensation, their combination in no way detracts from the unity of the painting. Spatial concerns always played a key role in Braque's work and led him to adopt approaches that put him in position to undermine tradition. (Like Picasso, Braque worked with *papiers collés* and experimented with the tactile and *trompe l'oeil* effects of his boyhood trade as a decorator.) For example, he avoided imitative representation of reality and its conventional system of photographic perspective. Braque generally obviated anything that might have created the impression of distance between objects, even when he would model their surfaces. I feel that he was more concerned with visual planes than with volumes. I can see in *The Guernon* that in this manner he remained closer to a purely two-dimensional pictorial work than if he had resorted to the subterfuge of suggesting the depth of a third dimension.

The dynamic that exists between objects and their spatial contexts is paramount to my visual investigation. This is why a formal analysis of Picasso's and Braque's collages has been very valuable for my own compositional decision-making. The consideration of placement, of weight, and of choices of colour and tone and their appropriate use have been important for the present investigation.

4 – Image ‘Pulp’ and the Re-produced Image in Painting

Dr. Chris McAuliffe (2011, p.24), in his foreword for the exhibition ‘Model



Fig. 7 James Lynch, *Sam's Picture* 2010

Pictures’, quoted the American critic Michael Fried by saying that the trajectory of Modernist painting was one of ‘the gradual withdrawal of painting from the task of representing reality – or reality from the power of

painting to represent it – in favour of an increasing preoccupation with the problems intrinsic to the medium itself.’

The work of James Lynch was featured in that exhibition. Lynch is a Melbourne-based painter who uses painted lightweight cardboard, photos and other soft materials to construct tabletop-scale tableaux of real and imagined incidents. He then paints from photographs of these staged models. In this way Lynch stabilises his subjects before he begins painting, making visible the basis of how he proceeds. Many of the subject shards used in his compositions have been excised from original contexts.

Fragmenting in the composition speaks to direct transferal from collage-constructed studies, breaking narrative into disconnected incidents. As McAuliffe

suggests, 'time becomes a staccato succession of incidents rather than a continuous flow' (2011, p. 81). The disrupted narrative is a constant and developed theme in my studio experiments. The filmic shard and the narrative elements speak to the 'non-event' in Lynch's painting. He does this by arranging 'positive spaces' in ways that allow the sum of the parts to amount to a more profound whole. This methodology engages the 'verifiable' with the likely fiction contained in contextual settings. The tabletop provides an intimate setting and the possibility of various angles of steepness, giving a reading of the impermanence of an unstable platform for the objects. The boundaries of the tabletop provide the initial 'frame'.

Subsequent frames come from peripheral shapes that menace, intersect and overlap the edge of the painting support. The immediate space between the edge of the support and the first major definitions of frame in the composition provides a zone where raw paint in the form of scumble and wash coalesces with early notations from the cartooning of the subject, allowing a reading as to the decisions made in the early stages of composition development.

What interests me is Lynch's adept painterly handling of the apparent space that exists in the recesses of the collage-shard inspired shape-elements of *Sam's Picture*. If there isn't enough mystery evoked by the placement of disembodied subject shapes, then further mystery is implied in the carefully 'feathered' wall and floor shadows.

My research relies heavily on the concept of the image being reproduced from drawing and photography for consideration and use in preparatory collage

studies for painting. I see parallel experiences for the making of painting to my own ambitions for this current project in the work of Lynch and Dalwood. Image source, and the various methods employed by these artists on the way to painting, offer possibilities for my project, especially in the generating of remembered spaces, places and people in my assertion of painting as a mnemonic device.

This analysis of selected works by these artists introduces the language required to appreciate the unique disciplines in the studio practices of the painter. In particular, the degraded images of history from the analogue era, together with the poorly printed digital image, align appropriately with the ‘vague’ and ‘uncertain’ memory-image retrieval methodologies of the research.

On reflection, from an adult perspective I have two readings of past events. One is through adults’ eyes where I understand (remember) a shocking past event, and the other is a recollection of the childhood experience (a very different understanding) of that same event. Both readings, or narratives, can be held simultaneously in a unifying spatio-temporal frame. It is from the age of 10 that, as discussed by Freud, a child will generally remember events in a narrative sequence that can be described in spatio-temporal and emotional terms. The space that I am talking about here is at the moment when this ‘history’, my ‘history’, as it is understood by me, is coming into being.

In this chapter I have described clinical definitions of memory, philosophical theories of memory, memory/imagination, memory/perception and how each of these must share and exchange functions to direct the development of methodologies for painting in this project. Subjects in painting are created through

cooperation between real and unreal, methodologies informed and advanced by functions of the real and the unreal. What is universal to the three theoretical contextual domains is the importance of distance between childhood age and adult age. An examination of theories relating to memory has helped me establish methodologies of pictorial representation which can provide ways of visualising the role that memory might play in the ‘coming-into-being’ of the child’s perception of the world and what that might imply for the individual’s later maturity

The following chapter describes the methodological strategies that derive, in part, from the analysis of the artists mentioned, and that were used to visually explore these theoretical contextual domains through the ways that they revealed and directed the selection of subjects and painting techniques for memorist evocation.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

This chapter will outline the studio approaches that I used to achieve the aims of the research. These approaches draw on contextual material from Chapter 2, extracting both conceptual frameworks and formal processes to repurpose that material in light of my research questions. The particular ways that paint, drawing media and collage work together to evoke the experience of remembering was the overarching concern for research and as such guided every step of the studio work. Further to this was the equally important inquiry into how drawing and painting from ‘life’ (the vestige objects) might result in a pictorial ‘difference’ between these elements and the scenes in which they are placed (noting that these scenes are an attempt to capture the fleeting memory grab of remembered times and places).

I have structured this chapter around five projects. Each project presents initial testing and subsequent outcomes and reflects on successes and failures in research. This chapter reveals breakthroughs and notes moments of consolidation and successful outcomes.

Project 1 – The Mood of Memory: Miasma, Soporific Stillness, Melancholia

Choosing Substrates and Wet Media

My first strategy was to use a range of surface treatments, with paint and mixed media, to test wet media’s usefulness in evoking remembered spaces. This took the form of using, as a first test, ‘medium-less’ acrylic washes and black ink with

a range of brushes and speedball nibs on primed and un-primed Magnani rag paper. The choice of paper was based on previous successful experiments with



Fig. 8 Nay, M. *Study* 2014

wet media and this material. The qualities of the paper – its texture, colour, weight and scale – were still to be decided in the initial testing.

Ultimately the paper held paint and ink wash, and its textured surface, and did not impede the dissipating of thin

washes and grounds for layering in composition by being overly heavy.

These experiments are somewhat analogous to the emotional states mentioned in the introduction. Broad brush-marked areas of thin wash with colours of muted chroma were layered to create a feeling of such states as the fug of miasma, sleep-inducing stillness and, depending on the viscosity of paint, various spatial ‘depths’. Wet media on paper produced some successful



Fig. 9 Nay, M. *Study* 2014

results that motivated me to extend experimenting into other paint media on different supports. The atmospheres of miasma and soporific stillness were the most successful for this series.

Early Painting Techniques, including Washes, Colour, and Brush Techniques

Testing involved layering thin washes to test the analogical associations this technique might have with modes of memory such as ‘flashbulb memory’ and



Fig. 10 Nay, M. *Study* 2014

‘trauma memory’ as discussed in the Context chapter. First tests involved applying a range of various blues, cool through warm/pthalo, Prussian and ultramarine with daubs of alizarins and various violets

with a view to these combinations being able to conjure and evoke such associations as the ‘mists of time’ and the ‘fog of memory’.

A key strategy was to combine line drawing with acrylic washes to develop the compositions, using peripheral objects such as furniture and ornaments to create contexts for the later inclusions of vestige objects and figure tableaux. Testing involved composing a range of interior spaces, putting objects in places remembered from childhood.

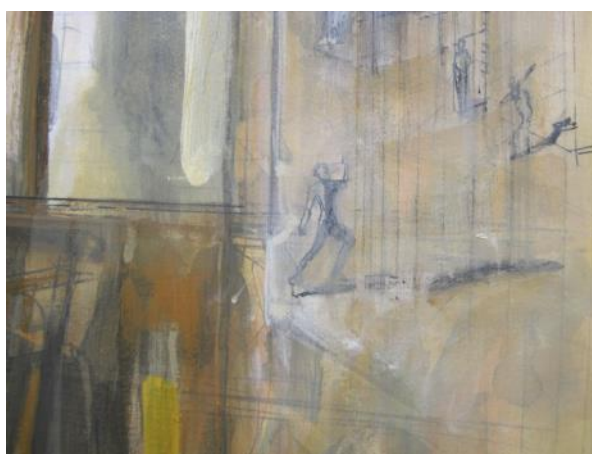


Fig. 11 Nay, M. *Study* 2014

Mood Meets Architecture

Early work involved developing drawings of architectural spaces, for example doors, walls and windows, described with washes, together with objects and landscape vignettes. An emerging interest in the possibility of washes invoking various atmospheres occurred as a successful by-product of early testing.

Translucent washes with a range of earth-palette colours created 'stewy' atmospheres, serendipitously useful as a mnemonic device for later use. These early studies attempted to dissolve drawn architectural spaces, landscape vignettes and objects within the 'fog' of the layered washes (see Figs. 10 and 11). It became clear that the translucent washes could be used to further refine the qualities of the otherwise vague notion of the 'fog of time'.

They began to take on particular characteristics or qualities (e.g. a stewy atmosphere) which I associated with particular times and places. Remembered spaces include the strong recollection of humidity, of indoor heat, of particular musty odours in bedrooms, of old people, bad chests, coughing in the night from gas poisoning from the Great War, echoing from the end of a corridor and sweaty body smells on furniture from recurrent malaria contracted during the Pacific Islands campaign of the Second World War. A particular research challenge was to test and apply appropriate colour, wash and drawing approaches to describe these particular 'fugs' as atmospheres in composition.

The Feeling of the Past: Subject Matter from Period ‘Style’, Furniture and Art

A strong memory I have is of prints of paintings by Russell Drysdale and generic



Fig.12 1960s Interior, Photograph 2014

‘abstract’ paintings by matriculating students at the school where my father was principal in the mid-1960s. Interestingly the abstract paintings were in the style of Ralph Balson and Syd Ball.

Compositional subjects for remembered interior spaces and the architectural styles of the era were sourced from such references as family photos,

generic furniture catalogues and shards of drawing that reveal remembered furniture and ornaments from childhood.

These ambiguous vignettes would later be based on photographic and filmic shards. The prints and artwork popular in waiting rooms, offices and school classrooms and corridors, refer to a ‘fashion of the time’. As a result of these preparatory drawings I began to develop others in which *objets d’art* and period furniture were integrated with the



Fig. 13 Nay, M. Study 2014

architectural space. The drawings also introduced landscape elements that were conceived as ‘glimpses’ seen from inside rooms. These objects, like the wall prints, were developed, in such a way that atmosphere, architectural space and landscape mingled with these peripheral subjects. Objects, like the wall prints, speak to the fashionable tastes of the middle class, which was growing in the 1960s. They included items such as hand thrown wine goblets – rustic Bendigo Stoneware with saturated iron oxide glazes on groggy clay.

This was a period of resurgence for the Arts and Crafts movement, led by artists such as Bernard Leach in the Japanese tradition, with objects like these in vogue in middle class homes. Eclectic and sometimes bizarre objects such as bread bins and salt pigs with cork lids and felt bottoms were common as an agricultural ‘hybrid’ of this style, popular in Australian taste and encouraged by Adult Education pottery and other craft classes.

An emerging sense of how compositions could be developed as contextual spaces for vestige objects had become apparent by this stage, as was the ‘haunting’ quality of memory narrative.

The Mood of Landscape

The picturing of partially observed landscape developed at this stage of the research. In the early work, landscape and locations of remembered early childhood are seen as vignetted pictorial elements. Studies were composed of white acrylic as a wash to thicken and obfuscate grids and to ‘make dense’ atmospheres to further deepen psychological readings. Pencil, acrylic wash



Fig. 14 Nay, M. *Study* 2014

and ink were used to compliment initial warm grounds. The early 'landscape' layers developed as a result of placing remembered childhood locations in developing compositions with earth-palette colours such as raw sienna, burnt sienna and van Dyke brown.



Fig. 15 Nay, M. *Study* 2014

Notation in the form of numbers and words appears ‘mid stage’ in ink, applied mostly by nib. These early studies included the writing-in of street numbers and names locating the remembered space in its corresponding geographic location. This tentative ‘mapping’ became conflated with the use of grid and numbering systems for transferring these studies to larger formats. Drawings from photographs were used in small composites that would later inform collage studies. Architectural spaces, photographed, help describe hallways, vestibules, lounge rooms, bedrooms and kitchens. These spaces parallel remembered spaces from childhood.

Project 2 – The Composition of Remembered Space

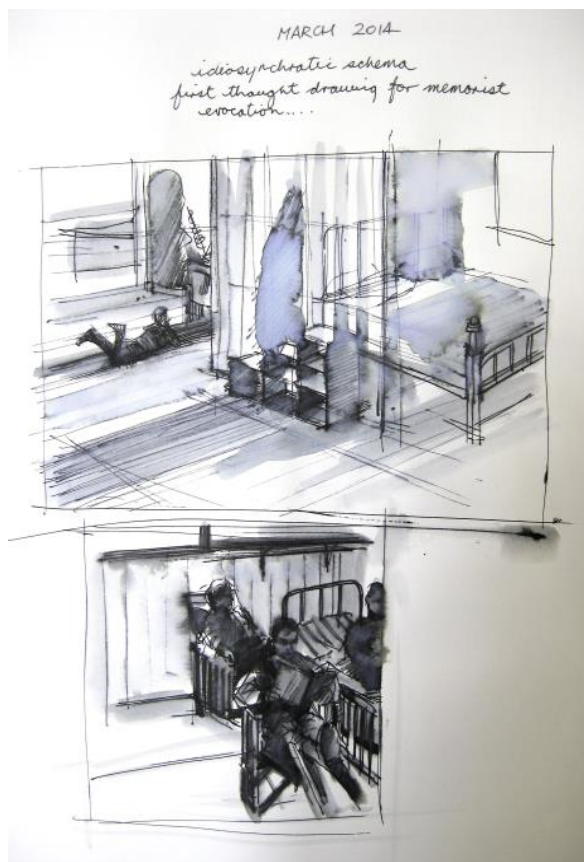


Fig. 16 Nay, M. *Study* 2014

These paintings are not ‘observed’ real scenes. They are hybrids of visual memory and association, including ‘stand in’ source material from family archives. The following is a description of the methods I worked with to achieve this.

Drawing Remembered Interior Space

An early working strategy was to use felt tip markers and pencil to draw



Fig. 17 Nay, M. *Study* 2014

remembered places, spaces and people. Some of these drawings look stilted because the felt tip marker tracked slowly and purposefully to gather vague memories into concrete form. In some drawings, energetic lines explored space in ways that appeared

to want to generate something tangible. Any fragment that suggested something of the past has been embellished in search of the concrete, the veracity of which connects with the primary aim of the project, that of picturing and articulating the workings of memory.

Early drawings supported and incorporated these wash studies, discussed in Project 1.

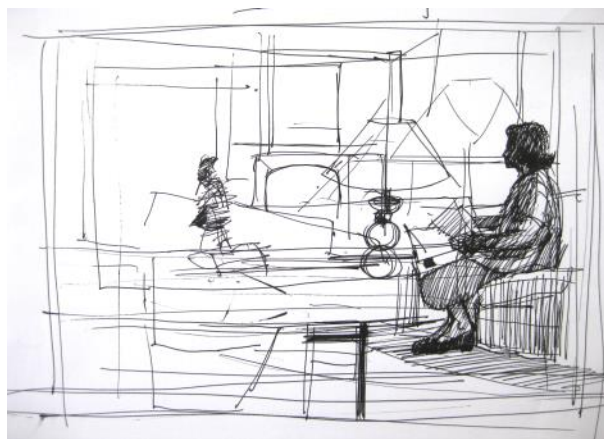


Fig. 18 Nay, M. *Study* 2014

Line drawing was the first attempt in finding ways to introduce subjects to the atmospheric states in compositions. This was the first test for their appropriateness in compositions for

later painting. Furniture in early subjects ‘stood in’ for specifying such things as time in history and human scale in the spaces created.

The Viewpoint: ‘Child’s Eye’ to Disconcertingly Ambiguous Fragmented Space

In the early stages of the project various perspectives were applied to recreate a



Fig. 19 Nay, M. *Study* 2014

child’s eye view of interior spaces, furniture and figures. Shallow picture planes and heroic perspectives influenced subjects in early acrylic-on-paper painting and explored such memories as the observation of a roadside

billboard near a mining city in New South Wales in the 1960s.

The disconcerting presence of the ‘marching Scotsman’ threatens in the way that it seems to step through the windscreen of the passing car. The child’s view of very confined spaces, which is also seen in the bayonet and couch work, was folded into the slightly more generous and liberated spatial interiors that became the focus of the later works in the project.

Collage Studies combining Fragments of Family Photographs with Line

Towards the middle of the investigation I began to juxtapose snippets of photographic elements with sketchbook studies.

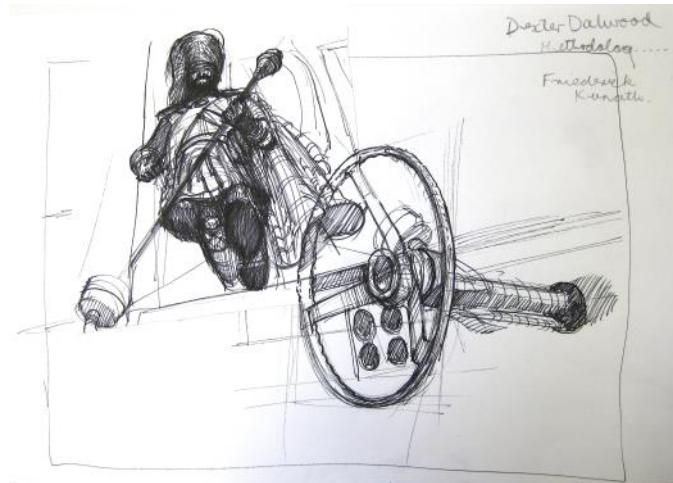


Fig. 20 Nay, M. *Study* 2014



Fig. 21 Nay, M. *Study* 2014

At first, absurd scale differences in pictorial subjects coalesced awkwardly in my rational and compositionally trained eye. On developing this approach it was apparent that the clumsy up-scaling and irrational scale associations conflated a ‘child’s vision’ with the uncertain pictorial mélange of an adult’s attempt at remembering a time from childhood. The flattened colours of the photographs co-acted interestingly with the scratchy linear contour lines of the preparatory drawing done for the collage. This posed an important research question. Could evocative memorist painting be constructed from such preliminary studies?



Fig. 22 Nay, M. *Study* 2014

The Importance of Collage

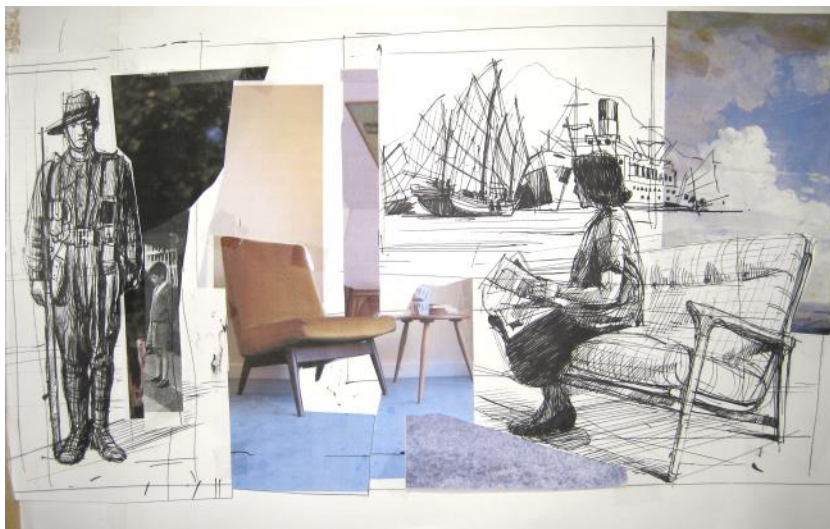


Fig. 23 Nay, M. *Collage study* 2014

The bringing
together of the
three subject
areas discussed
above – washes
for
atmospheres,
line drawing

and photographic imagery – was a turning point in the development of the project.

The evocative memorist potential needed for painting could be brought to fruition by constructing collages based on the conflated elements of remembered spaces, atmospheres, people and landscape. The abrupt cropping of these elements coexisting in the frames of interior space made for challenging preparatory studies for painting, inasmuch as painting needed to find ways to convey the look of

collage. Furthermore compositions were demanding a greater prominence of the vestige objects, hitherto relegated to peripheral significance.

A closer examination of contemporary painters, whose compositional structures in painting were based on collage studies, became increasingly important to the informing of studio strategies. Dexter Dalwood's subjects

(significant historical interiors), and his particular methodology of crudely 'conflating' elements of negative and positive space



Fig. 24 Nay, M. *Collage study* 2014

influenced my collage methodology, in particular the ways in which I introduced vestige objects to compositions. The mysterious and 'airless' atmospheres of James Lynch's paintings were of particular interest to me. His construction of models, photographing and composing collages 'on the flat' encouraged me to construct still life vignettes, stage-managing objects, lighting etc. Overlap and incongruous shadows were some of the serendipitous by-products of the works produced. I modified this working approach by photographing full and detailed aspects of a tableaux made up of vestige objects. This resulted in a stock of

images that could become elements for collage studies with the particular emphasis on generating evocative moods. The next section examines the impact on the project of the introduction of the ‘real’.

Project 3 – Introducing the Real

What happens when painting derived from ‘real’ observation interrupts unverifiable remembered scenes? Can objects stand in for absence in memorist painting?

Photographing Objects

As an initial strategy to bring objects into collage I arranged groups of vestige objects in ensembles and placed them in recreated contexts from childhood

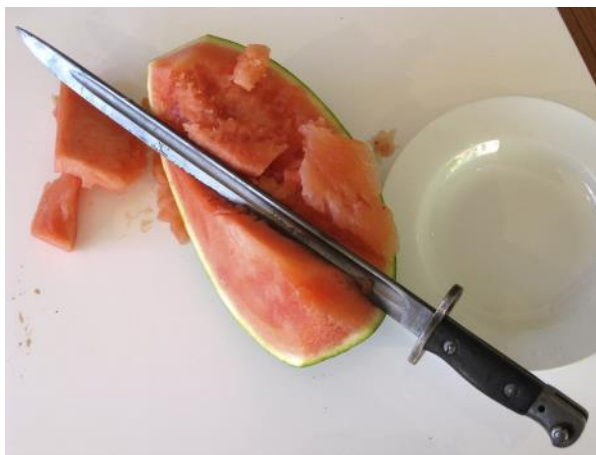


Fig. 25 Nay, M. *Photographic study* 2014

memory so that they could be photographed. My plan was to cut objects out from the photographs and place them in exciting collages constructed from shards of remembered space. The mundane domestic interior spaces of memory were

predominantly the kitchen and living room. I placed objects alone or together in ways that re-enacted their banal functions within these spaces as I remember them.

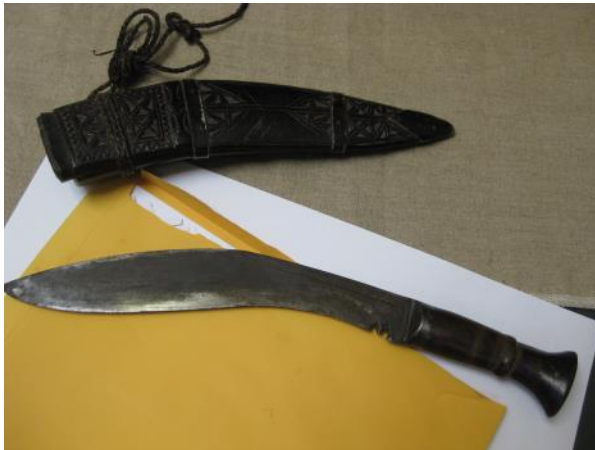


Fig. 26 Nay, M. Photographic study 2014

Placement, association and function were the goals of the photography. Lighting to enhance any particular dramatic effect was not a priority in the shoot. Light was necessary for helping to feature intimate

details; incongruous lighting on the object as it co-acted with its new function in collage was a helpful tension that I was able to exploit later in the project at the painting stage.

The painting that follows (Fig. 28), is an early example in which wash, remembered interior space, figure and objects coalesce in painting derived from drawing (see Fig. 29 and crude early collage methodologies, and Fig. 30). This painting however showed that the step from its preparatory study to the painting



Fig. 27 Nay, M. Photographic study 2014

itself was too great. A more 'informing' intermediate process was necessary. At this stage a greater emphasis on photography in collage became obvious as a way to further the project.

Although each of these objects – the bayonet, the Gurkha knife and the phallocrypt – have compelling connotations as objects of masculine power, and, indeed the intention has been to continue to emphasise this aspect in the works, at the same time the *memory* of them is much more banal, and in the confines of the family home their uses were much more domestic and domesticated: the bayonet was used to cut fruit, the knife to open letters, and the phallocrypt became a vase. The introduction of collage opened up possibilities for juxtaposing the matter-of-fact uses of the objects with collaged images that conveyed something of the real ‘other world’ of the bayonet, Dewars Highland Scotsman, the exotic Gurkha knife and others.



Fig. 28 Nay, M. Acrylic on canvas 2014

To photograph vestige objects I first removed them from protective places of storage. The handling of the objects afforded me intimate physical presence and (their) weights, textures and smells allowed me a new thinking about their intended functions outside of their domestic function as I remember them from childhood.



Fig. 29 Nay, M. Study 2014

Keepsakes such as these are powerful mnemonic devices for those who first acquired them, but in some ways domesticating them the way my family did was every bit as much about forgetting or diminishing their symbolic meaning and

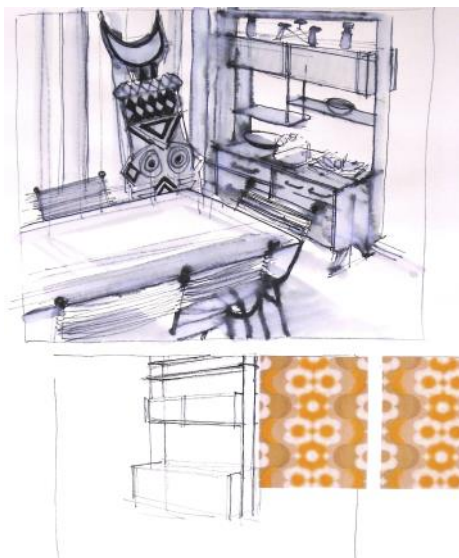


Fig. 30 Nay, M. Study 2014

thus normalising life, as they were important links to the past for the person that first acquired them.

These objects in their banal domestic function are mute to their implication in the traumatic experiences of their possessors. Fairly or unfairly they stand in for these traumatic histories. In the paintings they are pictured in their banal functional role from a

remembered childhood where they generated the least traumatic effect which was

tempered by their demonstrable and somewhat mundane practical utility. This third project reinforces the importance of the photographed image of real objects, and how they provided a critical, hitherto missing element, in the working structure of collage. Above all, this project describes one way of systematically ordering memories, feelings and thoughts of childhood for the act of painting.

The photographing of vestige objects developed into more complex and specific arrangements for roles in collage. The process revealed itself as a higher functioning methodology for the project to a point where I considered collage to be more effective in its role for memorist evocation than painting. Figs. 31, 32 and 33 are exemplars of this methodology.



Fig. 31 Nay, M. *Photographic study* 2015

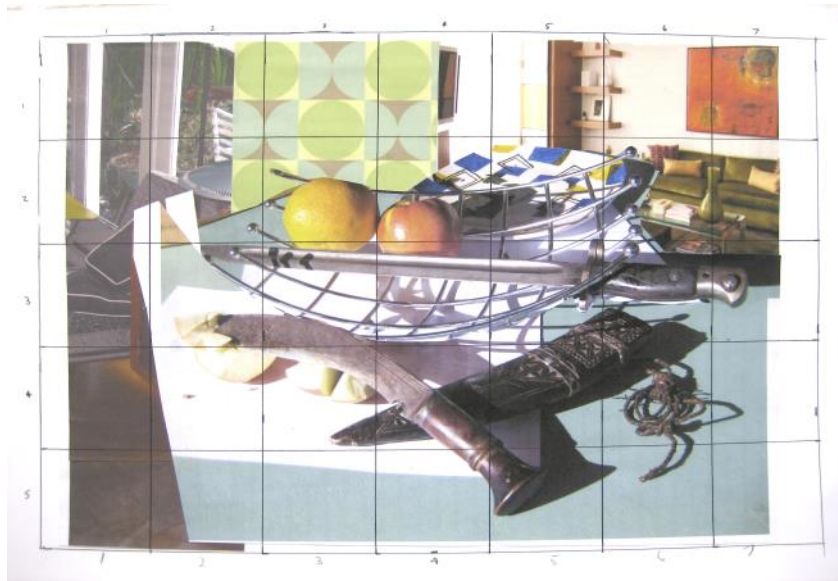


Fig. 32 Nay, M. *Collage study* 2015

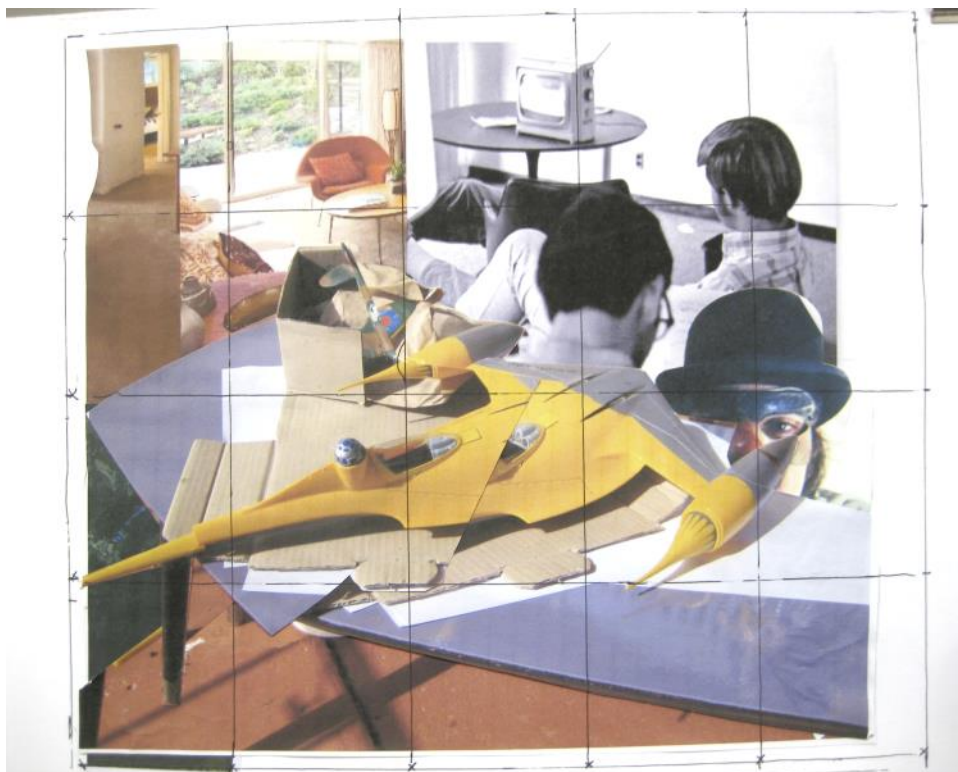


Fig. 33 Nay, M. *Collage study* 2015

In concluding discussion on **Project 3**, it is worth noting the importance of the various paint media selected for achieving the project aims. The media applied

before the introduction of photographic source imagery and how this methodology subsequently affected the decision making for painting choices that superseded the preparatory collage to conclude the project are discussed in **Project 4**.

Project 4 – Notes on Materials: Ink, Gouache, Acrylic, Oil

The following is a reflection on different drawing and paint media and their importance to achieving the project aims.

Pencil and Felt Tip Pen

Felt tip pens provided the very first marks in the studio drawing and their use continued throughout the project. My familiarity with the medium, an anticipation of the likely results of the drawing and, most importantly, its line-making capacity made it ideal for the ‘first thought’ delineation of remembered childhood spaces.

Water-soluble felt tips were desirable for their ability to be washed out after the primary drawing was made with brush and water to make atmospheric ‘fogs’. Pencil and felt tip continued to be used throughout the development of the late research painting. By incorporating pencil and pen in the painting process, both acrylic and oil, a sense of the ‘optimism’ felt in the early stages of the painting could be re-experienced and a momentum regained in the development of the work.

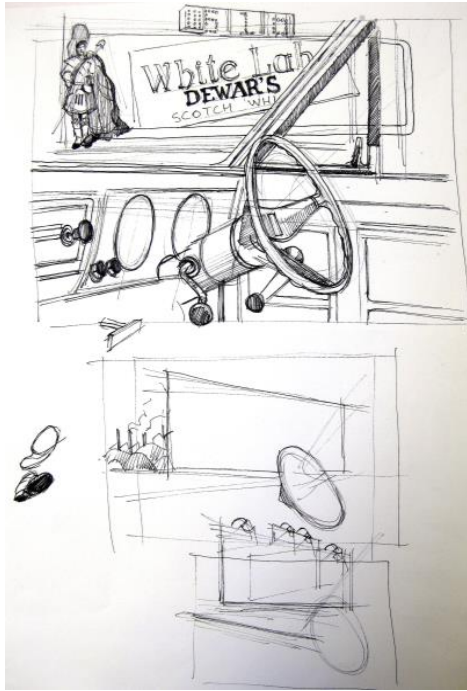


Fig. 34 Nay, M. *Study* 2014



Fig. 35 Nay, M. *Study* 2014

Drawing into a painting over dry, and sometimes wet, paint is a process I have observed in the work of Cezanne, and I have incorporated into my own painting practice over several years. Felt tip and pencil can render both vague and uncertain contextual subjects as well as controlled descriptive observations of real objects. These simple, accessible and versatile drawing

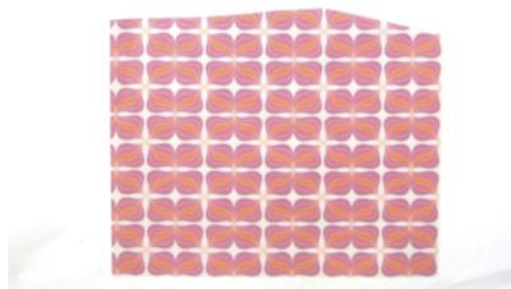


Fig. 36 Nay, M. *Study* 2014

tools proved invaluable in the way they could initiate studies and inform and interlock the working-processes of collage for the finished paintings.

Watercolour, Gouache and Acrylic Wash

The approach that developed from applying ink wash, consolidating tone and introducing colour, was watercolour and gouache. Like felt tip pens, watercolour can be applied immediately and directly and it allowed me to explore more freely the new subject matter of this research with this medium. Like the 'faux' wash areas created by wetting the felt tip, watercolour, by its very nature, could be applied in a wash state.

Watercolour's transparent qualities worked well over paper collage elements and over and against the water-soluble felt tip line, creating 'dissolved'



Fig. 37 Nay, M. *Mid process study* 2015

edges. The spaces and forms of these compositions in media-driven application have the hallmarks of vague and uncertain existence in time and (their) space. The paint medium in this instance is paramount in the interlocking of subject with this ethereal and evocative

space. The versatility of acrylic paint was put to good use from the start. Acrylic washes could mimic the look of watercolour in the transferring and upscaling of an idea from paper to canvas. Gouache cannot be overworked, acrylic can be. These distinctions are important to reflect on as decisions were made for project development in terms of a medium's limitations.

Acrylic Paint

Acrylic paint was the dominating and versatile paint medium that appeared in very early studio tests and was used in compositions on paper, over collage, on canvas and on linen throughout the investigation. Used with water alone in early tests on paper (Fig.38), acrylic paint could look dry, its plastic polymer sheen flattening renderings of space and form.

Acrylic performed excellently in the role of mixing complex and interesting tones. Using good quality brands meant that when chroma was needed



Fig. 38 Nay, M. *Acrylic on paper* 2014

for ‘affect’,
acrylic could
produce bright
areas of colour.
As with its
‘wash’ or ‘lean’
value for
assisting in the
interlocking of

composition: so too did it excel in its impasto or ‘fat’ consistency when it was used for interlocking elements of the vague, remembered ‘spaces’ of contexts and the ‘hard’, real forms of the vestige objects. The two areas where acrylic paint didn’t perform as well were in drying time and the glazing outcomes. This is where the qualities of oil paint were put to use and enhanced the final outcomes of the project.



Fig. 39 Nay, M. *Work in Progress*. 2014

Memory Made Real: Oil Paint

Oil paint proved to be the foremost paint medium for the project. Its versatility as a wash, impasto and glaze medium produced the desired effects for memorist evocation. The slowness of drying gave opportunity to evaluate the development of the painting. The historic look of the oil paint assisted the subjects of the painting to look by association, like they belonged to the past. My concluding remarks in the following section reflect on oil paint being unable to fully translate the look of collage. While collage emphasised the disjunctive edge of the elements, oil paint allowed a richness of surface, of illusion and of mood that was appropriate to the project. An interlocking of form, subject and material-form existed in the project outcomes as a result of the recognition of the inherent strengths and weaknesses of these things.



Fig. 40 Nay, M. *Study*, oil on canvas 2015

Project 5 – Picturing the Experience of Remembering

In this project I discuss the resolved work, referring to the aims and intentions expressed in the Introduction. One of the key aims was to make paintings that articulate the workings of memory, specifically of childhood.



Fig. 41 Nay, M. *Work in progress* 2015

The painting in Fig. 42 represents the culmination of the experiments with collage and ways in which collage can inform compositional form and subject for painting. The grid used for transference is still visible under early translucent passages of wash. I discuss in the Conclusion chapter, 4 how the grid in the final project paintings ‘stands in’ for landscape; a metaphor more than a literal representation. The photographic imagery discussed in the earlier projects is

evident in the late development of this painting and provides description and detail of the vestige objects. This contrasts with the vague and atmospheric spatial representations of remembered childhood space. The subjects (figures) are from childhood memory: the kitchen scene featuring banal domestic activities that includes the bayonet from the vestige object manifest.



Fig. 42 Nay, M. *Work in progress* 2015

Another key aim was to show how painting can use combinatory strategies drawn from memory, imagination and the depiction of 'real objects'. The various edges of shapes from the collage used to inspire this painting, including the formatted borders from printed images, create the frames within the surrogate frame-making architectural forms. The range of painterly responses to the collage schema for this work is broad, including wash, tracking in and around the

previously cartooned lines that delineate subjects, and the coaxing out of the vague and uncertain spaces of memory and imagination.

A further key aim was to show how painting might represent personal family histories as a ‘case study’ to test how memory can be made visual.



Fig. 43 Nay, M. *Study* 2014

Fig. 44 is an example of a painting test in which an inward reflection and an attempt to recreate memories of interior spaces from childhood came to fruition. The dominant interior space is what I remember of one of the settings of my grandparents’ house in the 1960s, an oppressive Edwardian-style city home that represents one of the core subjects of the family ‘case study’. This house was sold to pay a gambling debt. These grandparents lived with my family until their deaths in the mid-1970s. The periphery of this painting is constructed from remnant memory fragments of popular wall art images from that time: generic modernist abstraction and the 1960s rural genre.

Additional to previously mentioned aims I show how painting might bring the workings of memory into conscious recollection through visual form.



Fig. 44 Nay, M. *Study in progress* 2015

Fig. 38 is an example of a studio test in which strong depictions of remembered subjects were painted ‘graphically’ to parallel ‘flash bulb’ memory discussed in the Context chapter, 2. Around the strong, dark lineal interior architectural frames I have applied washed-out colours that represent a popular décor taste of the 1970s.

Can the depiction of real objects (extant, concrete and verifiable) be pitted against imagined, half-remembered spaces and contexts (past, unverifiable, ephemeral)



Fig. 45 Nay, M. *Study* 2015

to evoke the complexity of memory and recall? Fig. 45 is an example of memorist painting in which a tabletop presents an ensemble of vestige objects located in a

context of half-remembered spaces of memory. The objects depicted in a 'realist' representation declare their physical qualities and are also strong formal elements in the compositions, providing direction and disconcerting rhythms. The final paintings in the project declare that the 'concrete' is the domain of the actual. The subjects of memory must remain vague in their description, as the closer they get to the verifiable the more they lack verisimilitude. The tension in the painting is the void in 'that moment' where subjects shift from the unverifiable to the verifiable, the remembered to the real. This shift is the action, the doing moment in the mnemonic act in painting.

A key aim was to show how appropriate collage is for picture construction as a means of finding ways in which real objects coalesce with remembered and imagined space for painting.

The aim with the composition seen at Fig. 46 was to try to juxtapose the representation of the larger-than-life real bayonet and the pumpkin against a rather awkward self-conscious group of figures seen in a Great War photograph. It is meant to be an incongruous scene, on the one hand evoking the past when the bayonet served as a weapon of war, and on the other hand its relatively banal role as a domesticated object that serves its new purpose in the kitchen. The composition is intended to unify these two disparate contexts in an effort to express the idea that memory and dream can conflate two different times, two spaces, two subjects in a relatively seamless composition – where painting unifies, so to speak, these two seemingly mismatched scenes in much the same way memory might.



Fig. 46 Nay, M. *Collage study* 2015

A key aim was to demonstrate how painting ‘levels the playing field’, eliding the difference between painting ‘from memory’ and painting ‘from life’. Fig. 47 is an example of painting that shows the various outcomes of studio testing of painting as a mnemonic device. Paint needed to have various qualities as discussed earlier in this chapter in order to cope with the demands of such things as recreating the edges of collage shapes. It also had to exhibit chromatic qualities that could be sustained in rigorous mixing from dull to bright, and be used as a wash, opaquely and as a glaze. These qualities combine in ways that allow for seamless depictions of subjects of memory alongside subjects from life.



Fig. 47 Nay, M. *A History of Gas*, 1916, 1966, 2016 2015

These five projects have outlined the various approaches I have employed to articulate the difference between remembered space, the collage shard and the real object. It is the act of rendering all these *in paint* that homogenises the scene, holding the different parts together. On reflection I can see that my studio plan for painting was to exploit well-understood approaches seen in previous painting. However, several failures, as described in the earlier projects, including that of acrylic media to create satisfactory glazing and finishing effects, meant revisiting oil paint and devising new and suitable methods to achieve the necessary ‘evocative intensity’ the project was demanding. The challenge of representation, particularly the rendering of objects, was greater than I first envisaged. Some fundamental skills needed re-honing, particularly line drawing.

The importance of line as a ‘first mark’ in composition, particularly in the way it could delineate shape and ‘cross-object contour’, was critical in establishing painting. Ultimately it was image transfer from collage to painting-support and the subsequent testing for appropriate painting construction that provided the greatest of all studio challenges for the project. The discussion of the outcomes from the formal challenges as well as concluding remarks for the project come together in the following Conclusion chapter, 4.

Chapter 4 – Conclusion

In this Masters research project I set out to evaluate appropriate strategies within drawing, collage and painting to communicate memorist evocation in the depiction of objects in remembered space. This evocation, I proposed, would manifest itself in painting by the strategic placing of vestige objects, imbued with traumatic histories, into spaces that were remembered from childhood. A significant observation from my research is how paintings problematise the relationships between real objects, their remembered banality and their representation in paint. My paintings are about real objects and their histories, painted on canvas from life and/or photographic shards, coalescing in contextual spaces that are based on uncertain and likely fictional memories of childhood.

I have explored the world of the real, remembered and imagined. My enquiry utilised the working processes of drawing, collage and painting and these processes have now revealed pictorial events in fields of shifting relationships that speak to the coalescing of vestige objects and imagined and partially remembered spaces of childhood. My intention throughout was to test the relationships that exist between drawing and collage and what each of these key processes could bring to painting and memorist evocation and, furthermore, to test what painting could do differently from the immediate workings of collage. I have used collage ultimately as an informing process for painting. Collage was fast in the making; painting achieved the same thing, though more slowly and, I claim, in more nuanced ways. In the translation from collage to painting I was forced to step back

and consider how paint could offer better ways to answer the research questions. With painting, processes can be employed to control such things as drying time and paint viscosity. Paint has the ability to mimic such effects as the gloss of paper and to recreate any colour found in a collage, and in deeper and more spatially interesting ways. Rarely did I recreate in painting the various edges from collage that made the element of shape evocative of the moods and vagaries of remembered space.

It is important to reflect on the aims of the project; how some approaches were developed and refined; and how aspects of the artistic and theoretical context affected the finished project. To begin with, the washes and painting techniques, which reflected my interest in evoking the atmospheres of miasma, the soporific and melancholic, were constructive starts that changed as I investigated the clinical definitions of memory. This was a good start to the project and allowed me, for the first time, to align a painterly concern with a theoretical concept. Later, collage incorporated these atmospheric elements adapting them for representation in painting. Furthermore, the shards used in collages toward the end of the project, show how a correlation can exist between the two distinctly different definitions of soporific stillness described in the Introduction chapter, 1. The subsequent paintings show how the working processes of oil paint can exploit the variety of atmospheric effects needed in accounting for these definitions, from the sharp edged shapes in the airless still life compositions to the heavily layered and glazed interiors and ‘battlescape’ compositions of late project painting.

The interior as a compositional device was an ever-present structure for drawing, collage and painting, because it could contain specific, hermetically sealed atmospheres. Interior subjects provided the formal elements of shape, line and space that could be easily mimicked and referenced in later collage studies. Light and varying perspectives could be controlled in interior space: light could come from outside the frame through a window vignette; eye levels could be raised or lowered for heroic or vertigo perspectives. The photographing of interior space, with its attendant doors, frames, windows, walls and ceilings, helped provide subjects and formal elements for early methodologies. As the project developed the printed and photographed elements of interiors, used in collages, included the narrow white borders of the formatted print.

Increasingly this white line stood in as quasi-architectural space and was powerful in its at once suggestive and indifferent presence in the final paintings. The sometimes 90 degree angles of these structures provided a useful tension in the composition, tightly containing and contrasting looser and less defined passages of remembered memories of childhood. The interior in this series of works was the frame within the frame of the edge of the canvas. The project as it developed became increasingly about the introspective nature of the specific aspects of the family case study. The above methodology paralleled this introspection. This was an unexpected outcome and, I feel, a successful one to answer research questions.

I used furniture habitually in early compositions. My tactile memories are strong around the furniture of the 1960s and the 1970s. The intimacy of furniture

for the child as props, for standing against, jumping on and crawling under, I thought would be a strong ‘flank’ in the development of the project. Unfortunately there were confusing trendy associations around mid-century furniture. The furniture’s intended evocations, drawn from memory, were being misread. Furniture gradually took on ‘prop’ value, a secondary element in composition, signifying a time in history and indicating human scale and human presence; for example, a recently sat-in chair, or a tabletop, a bed to reinforce a bedroom space. The use of furniture in the work of Matthias Weischer was a useful reference for early painting. It was Weischer’s exceptional handling and application of paint, his calibrating of tone and colour, airless atmospheres and psychological tension that were helpful in painting for memorist evocation. In summary, except for unremarkable tabletops, the role of period furniture was downplayed.

Landscape was an element in the planning for painting early in the project. It was convenient because it could locate the work geographically, provide evocative elements such as cloud formations, and support or contradict spatial plays within the overall schema of a preparatory or final composition. I parodied Russell Drysdale’s under-painting (the initial application of paint over ground) and conflated actual geographic locations of childhood with elements of Drysdale’s work.

The evocation potential from remembering landscape lessened as vestige objects took on greater roles in drawing, collage and painting. The need to transfer, truthfully, the imagery from collage to painting, required gridding on canvas for accurate translation and I found that, more and more, the grid stood in

for landscape. It referenced map grids, de facto landscape and notation in the form of drawn scribbles, and numbering suggestive of house numbers, page numbers of street directories and Google Maps tools. This embellishment suggests uncertainty and questions the veracity of co-ordinates, a confusion that confirms unverifiable and ephemeral half-remembered spaces and contexts, a critical principle in the research questions. As discussed in the Methodology chapter, 3 the grid is sometimes resurrected from paint layer to paint layer, in places made extinct, operating on several compositional, structural and theoretical levels at once. As with interiors, landscape as a memorist strategy evolved to accommodate and adapt to the shifting direction of the project as it moved to completion.

In these concluding remarks on the project I would like to reflect on trauma, its place in the project and its significance in painting. The preliminary collages that I made did not depict the objects with enough visual impact, that is, enough to amplify their symbolic status. The vestige objects are symbolic. The paintings are composed and ordered around these objects. These objects are imbued with traumatic histories: how the objects functioned, the nature of their banal existences, are intimate details from the case study of the family and have been best represented through the methodologies discussed.

It is the representation of the object, as remembered from a time of its banal functionality, which operates best in mnemonic painting. The objects in the paintings are represented in ways that belie their primary, intended functions. As I developed the project, the primary challenge of the research undertaking became clear: how do I make pictures of elusive memories with real objects? An example

of how I've answered this question comes from a painting done late in research, in which a bayonet is represented as a kitchen utensil, up-scaled to twice its actual size in an attempt to reinforce the memory of it from childhood, drawn from the family case study. To the viewing audience this up-scaling appears to reinforce the function of the bayonet as a killing weapon.

I have determined that objects play two roles in memorist painting. Firstly, they are objects of domestic function of childhood memory, and therefore can only be placed as banal within compositions. Secondly, they represent the distinction between the graspable and the fleeting: these objects were rendered into compositions from life.

In my hand, vestige objects have physical presence and the weight necessary for their intended function. For example, bayonets are sturdy and durable for battlefield conditions and killing. The ceramic figurine is heavy enough to be placed with certainty, light enough to intimate that it is a precious ceramic, both features ensuring its longevity as a successful advertisement for Scotch whisky. Handling objects allows me to understand and own these experiences. This access to objects and the cumulative time spent with them during research is reflected in the way objects become waypoints in the painting. They are verifiable, and, as Halbwachs (1925, p. 48) suggests, provide us with an 'image of permanence and stability. They give us a feeling of order and tranquillity, like a silent and immobile society unconcerned with our own restlessness and change of mood.' An exemplary painting in this regard that

exhibits the confluence of all things discussed above is Fig. 48, *A History of Gas 1916, 1966, 2016*. 2015



Fig.48 Nay, M. *A History of Gas 1916, 1966, 2016* 2015

This is a painting developed from a collage study. In the transferring process and the drawing-up of the image, a grid was used and, in places where there are voids, the grid survives from the initial drafting. In more understated places the grid is evidenced on top of the final layer of paint. The grid not only stands in for landscape, but I have also used an actual landscape depiction from a photographic shard of a Great War battlefield that occupies the lower central area of the composition.

The landscape vignette, prominent in the early work, is now a looser element in the painting. This depiction has fewer defined edges, is more ambiguously placed, and is not exclusively framed in architectural space as before. The battlefield scene may have up-scaled its original place as a photograph on a mantelpiece and now operates as a looming structural and subject element in the composition. The atmospheres in the painting are the conflated subjects of Bat Girl and Robin, succumbing to the soporific effects of sleeping gas, and a likely gas-swept battlefield filled with prone, kilt clad bodies. A grandfather figure looks on nonchalantly, his ‘thousand yard stare’ of my memory, through and beyond the grey tones of an historical space seemingly disembodied from (this) place. Tonal depictions of a remembered place and space are quick and identifiable strategies to describe remembered places through association to archival black and white photographs.

Tonal passages in painting demand readings of drama, and in this instance relate directly to a time in history before colour photography. The subject of the battlefield photograph is anything other than melodramatic. Pink gas is the insidious miasma; its effect is to knockout and disable the figures in composition. Bat Girl from the 1966 television series, swoons melodramatically, Robin is, already supine, his indiscreet pose, in contrast to the war photographers’ careful adjustments made to the kilts of the dead Highlanders, posing them modestly before the photograph was taken.

The vestige objects used here are the mundane pocket book edition of Burns’ poetry and *The Log of the Cutty Sark*. Both are collage elements and are

placed and glued in the work self-consciously as if to inflate their likelihood of being seen. Both books speak to the Highland diaspora of my ancestry; the tartan cover of the Burns' poetry collection being a decorative device and likely patriotic or disrespectful in its juxtaposition against the bleak post-apocalyptic landscape. *The Log of the Cutty Sark* rests on the floor, the perspective of the picture plane in abeyance. Its only identifiable marking is the patrician cover, seen before it, like Bat Girl, succumbs to the effluvia.

I consider this painting in its structural coherency to make sense of the relationship between the snippets of childhood memory and the 'graspable' renderings of objects from life. Collage has informed the compositional outcomes, and, importantly, paint has been able to translate this in its own particular vernacular. Ultimately, whilst the subject matter of these paintings is drawn from my own personal experiences and associations for the depicted objects, for the viewer the paintings show the workings of memory and how it can be represented visually.

In conclusion, the enjoyable though pressured nature of the Masters research programme has enabled me to find a new voice in painting. I've gained new ways of approaching painting, developed new methods and have an appreciation of the value of placing my work in contextual frames. The broader knowledge gained in project undertakings, will have a lasting impact on my painting practice. I feel I have broadened my skill base and look forward to completing bodies of work that draw on my newly acquired research skills. I have

engaged in the rigor of experimenting and risk taking, both being crucial to the success of my studio based research inquiry.

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